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FOR ACTION

COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY NOTE**

Belize

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country programme strategy note for Belize for a programme of cooperation for the period 1997 to 2000.

Belize has been economically and politically stable, but a severe economic crisis now threatens the country's children. Structural adjustment measures, including reduction in social services, are under way. The crisis, an absence of policies and insufficient capacities threaten achievement of the World Summit for Children goals and compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

National objectives incorporate all relevant World Summit for Children goals. The proposed Belize country programme objectives include initiatives to sustain progress already made towards the achievement of those goals in light of structural adjustment measures and support for compliance with the Convention. There are three key areas where achievement of the goals is threatened: child nutrition; universal primary education; and child protection. Seven integrated and balanced strategies will be applied across the programme: advocacy and social mobilization; monitoring, research and data dissemination; capacity-building; community empowerment; gender sensitivity; child participation; and inter-ministerial management and monitoring. The programme will promote a holistic strategy for children and families. Priority areas will include nutrition, child health, women's health and AIDS prevention. In education, the pivotal concern will be to improve primary school completion rates, with strategies related to capacity development, early childhood education and special learning needs. Child rights strategies will be related to policy, advocacy, legal reform and institutional development.

* E/ICEF/1996/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1996.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Since independence in 1981, Belize, with a population of 200,000, has been a stable and economically growing country with good social indicators. However, current data reveal that this situation is changing and the social conditions of most Belizeans, particularly the poor and the children, are deteriorating. Reliance on protected markets for three primary products (providing 65 per cent of total export earnings) leaves the economy vulnerable to trade liberalization. In 1994, the British Forces, whose in-country expenditures contributed between 4 Structural adjustment measures are under way, and reductions in the national budget for the social sector have come at the time when there is greater pressure for services.

2. Preliminary findings of a 1995 study of the Caribbean Development Bank indicate that more than 23 per cent of Belizean households now live in poverty. The past decade's influx of Central American refugees and immigrants, estimated at 20 per cent of the population, has adversely affected all basic indicators, substantially increasing demands on the social sector as these groups are assimilated into the general population. International support for the displaced has been reduced, but their economic and social impact will continue to create a burden on the country. Under those circumstances, special efforts will be required to sustain achievements to date and prevent a slowdown in the attainment of the World Summit for Children goals. A Social Investment Fund (SIF), set to begin operations in 1996, and a proposed Village Council Act provide opportunities for reaching the most vulnerable and for incorporating children's issues into local-level decision-making and development.

3. Belize already has achieved most of the mid-decade health goals and is likely to achieve all of the end-decade health goals. However, special efforts will be required for the achievement of the nutrition, education and sanitation goals by the year 2000. Improved data information systems will be necessary for closer monitoring of progress of all goals as well as for informed decision-making during this period of economic adjustment. Immunization coverage for major childhood diseases was about 90 per cent in 1994; polio has been eradicated and efforts are under way to eradicate measles. Infant mortality is now officially reported at 34 per 1,000 live births (1993), with rates in the south at about 63. Perinatal conditions, acute respiratory infections (ARI) and diarrhoeal diseases are the major causes of infant and child mortality. The fertility rate, at 4.6, is one of the highest in the region, and adolescent pregnancy rates are high at one in five births. The maternal mortality rate is estimated at 160 per 100,000 live births. Only 24 per cent of mothers breast-feed exclusively for the first three months. Almost 75 per cent of the rural population do not have adequate sanitation. Belize faces the second highest per capita incidence of HIV/AIDS in Central America. Reliable data on child nutrition are scarce. Two studies suggest a range of severe malnutrition from about 1.3 to 2.4 per cent and moderate malnutrition between 5 - 17 per cent. Some degree of malnutrition appears to affect between 26 - 57 per cent of young children. There are indications that the most severe nutrition problems are in the Toledo district.

4. World Summit for children goals for universal primary enrolment and 80 per cent retention are threatened by a downward trend in enrolment of five year olds from 94 per cent in 1991/1992 to 89 per cent in 1994/1995, and only 40 of over 10 per cent for each class further illustrate difficulties which can be attributed to language barriers, parental attitudes, malnutrition, inadequate number of classrooms, child labour, poor teaching practices, poor early childhood development practices, poverty and childhood disabilities. Only

35 per cent of children aged three to five years are enrolled in pre-school. Less than 10 per cent of children with special needs are reached with services.

5. Belize was one of the first nations to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the National Committee for Families and Children is charged with overseeing compliance. The Committee has adopted the goal of reforming all legislation related to children, including children who have legal problems due to apparent increases in the disintegration of family structures, substance abuse, crime and violence among urban youth gangs.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

6. UNICEF-supported projects through national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been difficult to sustain and have had a minimal impact on national policy. Therefore, government ministries will be the major partners in the new programme. The issue of sustainability will be of paramount importance in the design and implementation of NGO partnerships. Cooperation is most successful when it links institutional development with policy changes and governmental resource allocations.

7. Having five programmes, each with several projects, led to a dispersion of activities, proved to be too staff-intensive and lessened the impact of the limited resources available. A complementarity of UNICEF inputs with other United Nations agencies and donors increased the impact and maximized the use of resources in some programmes. This approach will be expanded to include the development banks. Past support for local-level development has strengthened the role of UNICEF as a partner with the Government, communities and the United Nations Development Programme in incorporating a child-centred approach to the formulation of local development plans. Local-level development will be promoted within the framework of the proposed Village Council Act and SIF. The focus of the programme for children in especially difficult circumstances proved to be too narrow, therefore it was broadened to encompass child rights. Belize is politically, economically and culturally affiliated with both the Caribbean and Central America. Hence, the design of policies and programmes should be responsive to social sector initiatives of both regions.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

8. The Government of Belize is fully committed to the achievement of the World Summit for Children goals, which have been incorporated in the new national development plan. The country also is committed to implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has identified the need to revise child-related legislation for consistency with the Convention.

9. Strategies for sustaining and achieving the World Summit goals have been incorporated in the sectoral plans of relevant ministries; however, the plans could be affected by structural adjustment reductions. The planning and monitoring of social sector goals are constrained by the lack of baseline data - a problem UNICEF is currently addressing.

10. The country programme objectives are (a) to monitor advances towards the decade goals and support initiatives to sustain progress in light of deteriorating economic conditions and structural adjustment; (b) to support initiatives towards reducing childhood malnutrition, achieving universal primary education and improving child protection, for which there are currently inadequate policies, capacity and resource allocations to achieve the goals by the year 2000; and (c) to support the Government and civil society in monitoring compliance with the Convention towards progressively achieving full compliance.

11. Several strategies will be applied across the country programme. Advocacy and social mobilization will be key to increasing awareness of all sectors of society on goals for children and their rights, building a stronger base of support and making leaders conscious of the effects of economic adjustment on children. Monitoring, research and information dissemination to support advocacy and social mobilization at national and local levels will contribute to an increase in community demand for adequate services and improve policies. Capacity-building will focus on areas where greater attention and/or resources are needed to overcome significant impediments to the achievement of global goals and compliance with the Convention. Another strategy covers initiatives that empower communities towards a child-centred approach to development and decision-making. These include the application of the gender equality and women's empowerment framework and the promotion of methodologies for genuine children's participation in all country programmes. Stronger inter-ministerial management and monitoring will facilitate coordination and collaboration on child-related issues.

12. The programme will have three interlinked components: health and nutrition; education; and child rights. Under the health and nutrition component, four areas of intervention are planned: nutrition; child health; women's health; and AIDS prevention. In nutrition, the objectives will be the reduction of child malnutrition, comprehensive growth monitoring, improved rates of exclusive breast-feeding and the reduction of anaemia among pregnant women. Major strategies will include nutrition surveillance, advocacy, resource development and institutional capacity-building. Technical assistance will help to ensure that food security and income maintenance for the poorest are incorporated into adjustment policies and addressed through SIF. In child health, the strategy will continue to sustain immunization levels, to improve ARI management and to control diarrhoeal disease through the use of oral rehydration therapy and environmental sanitation and education. The Ministries of Education and Health will be assisted in establishing a school health programme. Maternal mortality will be addressed through an initiative with the National Women's Commission, the Ministry of Health and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Key follow-up actions to the International Conference on Population and Development will be supported through the Belize Family Life Association, with a focus on reducing adolescent pregnancies. In partnership with PAHO, the National AIDS Programme and the Ministry of Human Resources, UNICEF support will focus on education, multisectoral collaboration and issues of child rights.

13. Increasing the proportion of children who complete primary education will be the major priority of the education component. The reasons hindering completion of primary education are being analysed to refine current strategies. UNICEF will help to strengthen government and community capacity to mobilize resources and formulate interventions to improve the proportion of children completing primary education. In locations most affected by structural adjustment and diminishing resources, strengthening local capacities and parental involvement will be linked to collaboration with SIF. A cost-effective strategy for sustaining early childhood education coverage will focus on the families of the 65 per cent of children without access to pre-school education. For children with special learning needs, the practice of bringing children into the educational mainstream will be expanded through in-service teacher training and parent participation.

14. A three-pronged strategy will be used to help promote child rights: policy and advocacy; legal reform; and institutional reform and development. With the National Committee for Families and Children, advocacy will focus on the adoption of policies and the increase of resources, including those of SIF, to protect the most vulnerable children from the adjustment process and to improve

their situation in the longer term. The Committee's capacity for effective monitoring of compliance with the Convention and achievement of the World Summit goals will be reinforced. There will be parallel efforts to incorporate children's issues into local-level and village activities. A child work initiative will aim to eradicate all labour of children under 12 years of age and link the labour of 12- to 14-year-olds with apprenticeship and education. UNICEF will support the formulation of a Children's Act. Legislation reform will be followed by training and strengthening institutional capacity to ensure compliance. Law enforcement capacities will be strengthened, particularly through the District Family Court. Capacities of the Family Services Division will be strengthened in the areas of prevention, family life education and transition from an institutional-based model of interventions to one of family-based rehabilitation, fostering or adoption.

15. The Belize country programme will support and complement subregional initiatives in Central America and the Caribbean. The subregional component will enable the country programme to use organizational links, agreements and resources of both the Central America and Caribbean regions to strengthen national efforts to improve the situation of women and children.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

Estimated programme cooperation, 1997-2001 a/
(In thousands of United States dollars)

	General resources	Supplementary funds	Total
Health/nutrition	1 250	1 000	2 250
Education	1 000	750	1 750
Child protection	1 500	750	2 250
Total	3 750	2 500	6 250

a/ These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.